

BIA TO UP INDIAN EDUCATION

BIA Conforming to Pres. Johnson's Call To Upgrade Schooling

Charles N. Zellers, Assistant Commissioner (Education) in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, delivered an address in the auditorium of the Northern Arizona University in a workshop of the BIA teachers recently.

In a voluminous talk he entitled, "Zap," Zellers revealed that the BIA was

preparing a new era of Indian education designed to improve many areas of teaching.

"ZAP," he said was a relatively new word making the rounds, a word which implies force so powerful nothing can withstand it.

"Over the long run education, we know, is zap—but the long-run is too far away. What hurts is the short run. In the long run anything is possible, but in the long run we'll all be dead anyway," Zellers said.

"These workshops," he continued, "the first of their BIA has ever held—are a first step in putting education into the short run, into the NOW.

"And zap is something we need now because education is going through a period of testing. It's being tested everywhere. And I think this testing is extremely valuable for all of us."

Zellers pointed out that since Robert Bennett was named Commissioner of Indian Affairs two years ago, who, by the way, he said, was the first Indian in 100 years to direct BIA, the whole education system has

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been expanded and made more functional.

He said that one of Bennett's earliest actions was to upgrade education, to give it strength of a division. Zellers stated:

"As a division, five branches were created to support it—pupil personnel services, which spearheads our efforts to improve health and counseling and guidance services to Indian students;

"Curriculum development, which promotes higher standards of teaching and learning; instructional services which cuts into upgrading of teachers and their training;

"School facilities, which does the long-range construction planning; and public school relations, which administer the Johnson-O'Malley Act."

Zellers said the new Division of Education is now busy inaugurating new programs, hiring new personnel—including specialists in psychology and guidance.

He said the new division wants to do the following things:

—Improve the health of Indian students.

—Improve the curriculum at Indian schools.

—Extend education at both ends of the spectrum in Indian schools by providing kindergartens as rapidly as possible and, at the same time, making junior college and full college education freely available to greater numbers of Indian students.

—Shrink class size by providing more classrooms, more teachers, more teacher aids and para-professionals to help teachers.

—Expand vocational education programs.

—Imbue the whole BIA school system with an increased respect for Indian history and culture.

—Expand pupil personnel services.

Zellers said the last was the responsibility of the Branch of Pupil Personnel Services in the Division of Education.

He said the division sees pupil personnel services as guidance and counselling, special education, psychological service, and social work activities that are so inter-related with the rest of the disciplines that they become welded into them, that they become an integral part of school—not an appendage.

"The overall objective of BIA is to get out of the education business as rapidly as possible, making sure that whatever services are substituted are at least equal to or better than its own," Zellers stated.

"In the last 15 years, in fact, BIA has closed down or turned over to public operation more than 100 schools which it formerly operated."

He said, however, that last year the BIA still had to build eight new school facilities.

"The fact that two out of three Indian students attend public schools attests to the sincerity and success of this policy," Zellers said.

Beginning in September, he said, the BIA intends to take this policy even further, as President Johnson requested in his special message to Congress.

"At that time, BIA will begin to actively promote the formation of school boards, made up entirely of Indians or nearly entirely of Indians, to operate the schools.

"This will allow Indian citizens to have a greater voice in the operation of what is, essentially, a local resource, and prepare them further for the day when the school eventually will become public, will become theirs not only to run but fund," Zellers said.

Zellers pointed out that there are about 142,000 Indians of school age—between 6 and 18 years old—who are enrolled in schools for which the BIA has some kind of responsibility.

He said that this amount does not count the thousands of Indian youngsters who belong to tribes that are now on their own or for whom the States assume responsibility.

"But of the 142,000 youngsters, only 55,000 of these go to schools directly operated by the Bureau," he said.

The rest are enrolled, he said, in public schools and the public schools are responsible for meeting their educational and health needs in the same way schools everywhere are responsible for the children within their walls.

Charles Zellers dwelt at great length on the special message of President Johnson on American Indians.

He said the President spelled out problems and made recommendations in many other areas besides education.

And these were: health, jobs, economic development, housing, water and sewer projects; civil rights, helping Indians living outside of reservations; settling land claims of Alaska natives.

"But government efforts in all these areas," Zellers said, "the President said, should be in the form of partnership—not paternalism."

"We must affirm the right of the first American to remain Indians while exercising their rights as Americans. We must affirm their right to freedom of choice and self-determination."

"We must seek new ways to provide federal assistance to Indians—with new emphasis on Indian self-help and with respect for Indian culture."

"And we must assure the Indian people that it is our desire and intention that the special relationship between the Indian and his government grow and flourish..."